

U.S. Says 1939 German-Soviet Treaties Are Real

By ROBERT PEAR

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WASHINGTON, June 4 — Federal archivists said today that there could be no doubt about the authenticity of the 1939 German-Soviet treaties assigning the Baltic republics to the Soviet Union, even though the original documents have never been found and the German versions were apparently destroyed by the Nazis in World War II.

The archivists said that microfilm copies of the documents were discovered in Germany in 1945, and that a microfilm copy of the German microfilm was available for inspection at the National Archives here.

On Thursday, the new Soviet legislature formed a commission to determine whether the Baltic republics had voluntarily joined the Soviet Union or whether they had been taken by force under the 1939 agreements between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Defining Interests

The Soviet President, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, was apparently correct when he said in the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies that no one had found the original versions of the 1939 agreements. But American archivists said he was wrong to suggest that the microfilm copies might be fraudulent.

The agreements in question defined Soviet and German "spheres of interest in Eastern Europe." The first agreement was signed on Aug. 23, 1939 as a secret protocol, or annex, to a non-aggression pact signed the same day by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The protocol assigned Latvia and Estonia to the Soviet sphere and Lithuania to the German sphere.

A second protocol, signed Sept. 28, 1939, after Hitler's conquest of Poland, transferred Lithuania to the Soviet sphere. The three Baltic republics were independent between the world wars and were formally annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

Robert Wolfe, the supervisor of captured German records at the National Archives here, said the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, ordered the original documents destroyed. But the man who was in charge of their destruction, Carl von Loesch, made microfilm copies, Mr. Wolfe said. The microfilm was buried.

Story Told in 1945 Report

The story of its retrieval is told in a report by Lieut. Col. Robert C. Thomson, the leader of a team of British officers working in Germany in 1945. The report said Mr. von Loesch, one of Hitler's interpreters, approached a British military officer and "offered to reveal the whereabouts" of microfilms containing "the most secret archives" of the Nazi Foreign Office.

Together with an American officer, they dug up a canister containing the microfilm on May 14, 1945 near Mühlhausen in Thuringia, a region in what is now East Germany. The German microfilm was taken to Britain, where prints were made in 1945. From the prints, new microfilm was produced.

Soviet officials do not accept the microfilm copies as authentic. In August, Valentin M. Falin, who was director of the Novosti press feature service, said, "It is hard to say accurately what in those copies corresponds to reality and what has been forged."

But George O. Kent, a professor of history at the University of Maryland, said: "This film authenticates the protocol more positively than even a purported original. For the protocol was filmed between a great many other documents whose validity has not been questioned, and it would be harder to counterfeit a whole roll of film than a single document."

The captured German microfilm was given to the West German Government in the late 1950's.

Hans Klein, a spokesman for the West German Government, said on Friday in Bonn that Chancellor Helmut Kohl had made the microfilms available to Soviet historians in December, at Mr. Gorbachev's request.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is investigating the relationship between the 1939 agreements and the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, who is overseeing the investigation, said he had established "the chain of custody documenting the authenticity of these secret protocols."

The official Soviet position, as stated in August 1988, holds that there is no proof the protocols existed. Soviet officials have contended that the Baltic lands willingly accepted Soviet rule.

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